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Roberta Gassman
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State of Wisconsin

Department of Workforce Development

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Secretary Gassman Applauds Workforce Connections Graduates ***Successful Rock County OIC Program began last fall***

Beloit - Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Secretary Roberta Gassman on Friday praised the latest graduates of a successful program the Rock County Opportunities Industrialization Center began with a \$150,000 training grant that Governor Jim Doyle announced last fall as part of his Grow Wisconsin plan.

Workforce Connections focuses primarily on 18 to 30 year old minority males who have had difficulty finding and keeping jobs. As many as 15 at a time undergo six weeks of training in job readiness, work on the so-called soft skills to build confidence, create a positive attitude, prepare for job interviews and visit potential employers. Six individuals were honored Friday, bringing to 30 the number of successful graduates in the initial year of the program.

"This collaborative effort proves once again that by helping people help themselves, we can make a big difference," Secretary Gassman said. "These are individuals who faced employment barriers and nearly lost hope. Today, they are working. The initial graduates of the program have been on the job 120 days. The April graduates are approaching 90 days on the job. And here's the best part, their average earnings are nearly \$11 an hour. They earn decent wages; established a work history. They're on their way to a better life."

Secretary Gassman said Workforce Connections graduates are job ready at a time when job opportunities are growing. Apart from overall demand for workers as baby boomers retire, she noted recent positive developments in the Beloit economy. Just this week, Governor Doyle announced a \$354,000 Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) grant for a road construction project aiding the expansion of two Beloit employers, Kettle Foods and Staples, Inc. Together, the Kettle Foods and Staples expansions are expected to create over 850 jobs, directly or indirectly, generating more than \$20.7 million in annual wages in Wisconsin.

In congratulating the latest Workforce Connections graduates, Secretary Gassman also praised Rock County OIC and its partners, the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Blackhawk Technical College, Community Action and the Rock County Job Center.

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